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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 21, 2007

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GUILTY PLEA IN GAS STATION ATM CARD SKIMMING CASE

SACRAMENTO--United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that CLAUDIU HOTEA, 34, of Orange County, California, pleaded guilty to credit card fraud before United States District Judge Morrison C. England, Jr.

This case is the product of an extensive/joint investigation by the United States Secret Service and Placer County Sheriff's Department, assisted by bank investigators and BP/Arco retail security advisers.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Matthew D. Segal, who is prosecuting the case, on January 26, 2006, the defendant was observed at Thunder Valley Casino using different cards to make multiple, back-to-back withdrawals from an ATM. Investigators with the Placer County Sheriff's Department arrested the defendant and found on his person Starbucks gift cards that had been re-encoded to function as ATM cards. The ATM card data had been skimmed from customers who had used their cards at local Arco/AM-PM stations. Bank investigators "link analysis" connected the defendant's counterfeit ATM cards to other fraudulent cards. The total attempted ATM withdrawals was \$576,650.00. The total successful withdrawals equaled \$185,896.25.

The defendant is scheduled to be sentenced on June 14, 2007, at 10:00 a.m. Since Hotea's arrest, Arco/AM-PM has spent over \$1 million to enhance the security of its terminals.

The maximum statutory penalty for access device fraud with a prior is 20 years imprisonment. However, the actual sentence will be dictated by the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of factors, and will be imposed at the discretion of the court.

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